

Message Text

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SUBJECT: THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY IN THE POST ELECTORAL
PERIOD

REF: STATE 124266

SUMMARY: NO GROUP WAS MORE SURPRISED WITH THE SIZE OF ITS
ELECTORAL GAINS THAN THE LEADERSHIP OF THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST
PARTY (PCI). THE ELECTION RESULTS OBVIOUSLY STRENGTHENED
PARTY SECRETARY BERLINGUER'S CONTROL OVER THE PARTY APPARATUS
AND SHOULD PROVIDE HIM WITH A RELATIVELY FREE REIN IN SETTING
THE PCI'S FUTURE COURSE. ALL INDICATIONS, I.E., PUBLIC
STATEMENTS AND PRIVATE COMMENTS, POINT TO THE PCI PROCEEDING
CAUTIOUSLY IN THE DAYS AHEAD. AT THIS JUNCTURE THE PCI CAN
BE EXPECTED TO REMAIN OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM OF NATIONAL
POLITICAL MANEUVERING WHILE MOVING TO CONSOLIDATE THE
ELECTORAL GAINS SCORED BY THE PARTY ON THE REGIONAL, PRO-
VINCIAL, AND LOCAL LEVELS. END SUMMARY.

1. AMONG THE MOST SURPRISED BY THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PARTY'S
ADVANCES IN THE JUNE 15-16 ELECTIONS WAS THE PCI LEADERSHIP.

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WHILE CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC THAT THE PCI SHARE OF THE VOTE

WOULD REACH THE 30 PERCENT LEVEL, A JUMP TO MORE THAN 33 PERCENT, PUTTING THEM WITHIN TWO PERCENT OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (DC), WAS CERTAINLY WELL BEYOND THEIR EXPECTATIONS.

2. AT THE PRESENT TIME THE PCI LEADERSHIP GIVES EVERY EVIDENCE OF STILL BEING IN THE PROCESS OF TRYING TO ASSESS THE FULL MEANING OF THE ELECTORAL GAINS. WHILE RECOGNIZING THE IMPORT OF THE YOUTH VOTE COMPONENT IN THEIR ELECTORAL ADVANCE, MANY IN THE PCI ASCRIBE THE MAJOR PORTION OF THE GAINS TO A COMBINATION OF POPULAR PROTEST AGAINST THIRTY YEARS OF DC BAD GOVERNMENT AND OF HOPE ON THE PART OF AN INCREASING PORTION OF THE ELECTORATE THAT A PARTY WITH A CONCRETE PROGRAM OFFERS THE LAST CHANCE OF SAVING ITALY FROM SEVERE CRISIS. ADDITIONALLY, MOST OBSERVERS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE PARTY AGREE THAT ANOTHER IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF THE ENTIRE EQUATION IS THE FACT THE PCI HAS GAINED ACCEPTANCE AMONG A SUBSTANTIAL PART OF THE ITALIAN POPULACE AS A RESPONSIBLE AND DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL MOVEMENT. THE TASK NOW CONFRONTING THE PARTY LEADERSHIP IS HOW TO TRANSFORM THE ELECTORAL ADVANCES OF JUNE 15-16 INTO A GREATER ROLE FOR THE PARTY ON A NATIONAL LEVEL.

3. PARTY SECRETARY BERLINGUER HAS EMERGED FROM THE ELECTIONS IN A STRONGER POSITION THAN EVER, AND IT IS LIKELY THAT HIS PRE-EMINENT AUTHORITY IN PARTY CIRCLES HAS BEEN REINFORCED. AS THE OLD ADAGE SAYS, "NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE SUCCESS ITSELF". IN BERLINGUER'S CASE HE CAN TAKE FULL CREDIT FOR GIVING LIFE TO AND NURTURING ALONG THE PARTY'S POLITICAL LINE AND STRATEGY, I.E., THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE, THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE PCI'S LARGEST GAINS IN THE POST-WAR ERA, DRAWING INTO THE FOLD LARGE NUMBERS OF VOTERS FOR WHOM IT WOULD HAVE BEEN INCONCEIVABLE IN THE PAST TO VOTE FOR THE PCI. ADDITIONALLY, HIS STRONG PERSONAL LEADERSHIP IN DIRECTING THE PCI'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE DC ON THE GROUNDS OF BAD GOVERNMENT AND POOR MANAGEMENT OF THE ECONOMY HAS PRESUMABLY INCREASED HIS PRESTIGE IN LOCAL PARTY CIRCLES, PARTICULARLY IN AREAS WHERE THE PCI WILL BE ENJOYING ITS FIRST TASTE OF POWER OR WHERE PCI CADRES AND OFFICIALS SEE FOR THE FIRST TIME THE PROSPECT OF ACHIEVING A SHARE IN THE GOVERNING OF THE COUNTRY THROUGH THE ELECTORAL PROCESS.

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4. THE ELECTORAL RESULTS SHOULD IN LARGE MEASURE REDUCE THE SIMMERING ANIMOSITY DIRECTED TOWARDS BERLINGUER BY THOSE WHO SAW THEIR POSITIONS REDUCED OR WHO BELIEVED THEY FAILED TO GET THEIR PROPER RECOGNITION IN THE REORGANIZATION OF THE LEADING ORGANS OF THE PCI FOLLOWING THE 14TH PARTY CONGRESS HELD LAST MARCH. BY REDUCING THE SIZE OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND ELIMINATING THE POLITICAL OFFICE, BERLINGUER

DID NOT INCREASE HIS POPULARITY WITHIN SOME SEGMENTS OF THE PARTY. ADDITIONALLY, THERE IS EVIDENCE WHICH WOULD INDICATE THAT SOME IN THE PARTY WERE CRITICIZING BERLINGUER FOR SURROUNDING HIMSELF AFTER THE CONGRESS WITH A RETINUE OF "YES MEN" AT THE EXPENSE OF VETERAN LEADERS OF THE PCI WHO COLLABORATED WITH TOGLIATTI AS WELL AS OF THE GROUP OF FUNCTIONARIES IN THEIR MIDDLE YEARS WHO FAVORED AND DETERMINED HIS OWN RISE TO THE TOP OF THE PARTY. TO THE EXTENT THAT ANY OF THIS ANIMOSITY REMAINS, WE WOULD EXPECT IT TO STAY WELL BELOW THE SURFACE. AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS LIKELY THAT BERLINGUER WILL BECOME THE PRINCIPAL SPOKESMAN OF THE PARTY ON VIRTUALLY ALL DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES.

5. AT THIS POINT THE PARTY APPEARS TO BE ASSESSING CAUTIOUSLY AND METHODICALLY THE MEANING OF THE ELECTORAL RESULTS IN TERMS OF THE PARTY'S FUTURE POLITICAL STRATEGY. INTERPOLATING FROM POST-ELECTORAL RHETORIC OF PCI LEADERS, PARTICULARLY BERLINGUER, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE PARTY SEES THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE AS AROUND THE CORNER. NOR DOES THE PARTY SEEM TO FAVOR A GOVERNMENT CRISIS AT THIS JUNCTURE WHICH COULD ONLY FURTHER CLOUD THE MURKY POLITICAL WATERS WHILE AT THE SAME TIME RUNNING THE RISK OF COMPLICATING THE ALREADY DIFFICULT ECONOMIC SITUATION THROUGH PROLONGED GOVERNMENT PARALYSIS. THE PARTY DOES NOT NOW FAVOR EARLY POLITICAL ELECTIONS SINCE THE LEADERSHIP DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT THE RESULTS WOULD BE SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF THE JUNE 15-16 ELECTIONS. HENCE THEY WOULD DO LITTLE TO FURTHER THE PARTY'S QUEST FOR AN EVENTUAL SHARE IN THE GOVERNING OF THE COUNTRY.

6. PCI STRATEGY AT THIS JUNCTURE WOULD SEEM TO BE CENTERED ON CONSOLIDATING THE NEWLY GAINED POWER ON THE LOCAL, PROVINCIAL, AND REGIONAL LEVELS AND STAYING OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM OF THE NATIONAL POLITICAL MANEUVERING. BY CONCENTRATING

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ON A "CAN DO" PERFORMANCE OF HONEST, EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, THE PARTY SEEMINGLY FEELS THAT IT CAN PREPARE ITSELF FOR THE 1977 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AT WHICH TIME THE PCI COULD BE IN AN EVEN STRONGER POSITION, IN THE LEADERSHIP'S VIEW, OF CHALLENGING THE DC SUCCESSFULLY AS THE LARGEST POLITICAL FORCE IN ITALY. THIS CAUTIOUS APPROACH WOULD ALSO SERVE THE DUAL OBJECTIVES OF THE PCI OF FURTHER STRENGTHENING ITS ALREADY POPULAR IMAGE AS A RESPONSIBLE, DEMOCRATIC PARTY WHILE LESSENING EVEN FURTHER THE REMOTE POSSIBILITY OF REACTION FROM THE RIGHT.

7. IN TERMS OF THE PARTY'S POSITIONS ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THERE WILL BE ANY CHANGES IN THE NEAR FUTURE. TO THE EXTENT THAT IT IS POSSIBLE AND EVEN NECESSARY, THE PCI WILL ATTEMPT TO NEUTRALIZE THE ARGUMENT USED BY ITS

OPPONENTS THAT IT IS CLOSELY LINKED TO THE SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY. IT CAN BE EXPECTED TO TAKE STANDS ON PARTICULAR ISSUES, I.E., PORTUGAL AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA, ON THE BASIS OF HOW THE LEADERSHIP PERCEIVES THEIR IMPACT ON DOMESTIC POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS. IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST MOVEMENT, THE PCI CAN BE EXPECTED TO OPPOSE ANY EFFORTS BY MOSCOW TO EXERT ITS HEGEMONY OVER OTHER PARTIES. (AN EXAMPLE OF THIS IS THE ITALIAN POSITION IN THE PLANNING OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN COMMUNIST PARTIES.) NEVERTHELESS, THERE WILL CONTINUE TO BE A CLOSE IDENTITY BETWEEN THE VIEWS OF THE SOVIET UNION AND THE PCI ON MOST KEY INTERNATIONAL ISSUES.

8. FINALLY, THE QUESTION OF THE PCI POSITION TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES HAS OBVIOUSLY ASSUMED MORE IMPORTANCE FOR THE PARTY AS IT INCREASES ITS EFFORT FOR A ROLE IN THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT. FOR BETTER OR WORSE AT LEAST CERTAIN SEGMENTS OF THE PCI LEADERSHIP BELIEVE THE PARTY NEEDS SOME TYPE OF US "BLESSING" BEFORE BEING ABLE TO ENTER THE GOVERNMENT. TO THIS END, THERE HAVE BEEN NOTABLE SHIFTS IN CERTAIN PUBLIC POSITIONS OF THE PCI ON KEY ISSUES IN WHICH THE US IS INTERESTED, PARTICULARLY ITALIAN MEMBERSHIP IN NATO. (IT IS WORTH MENTIONING HERE THAT PCI DIRECTORATE MEMBER GIORGIO AMENDOLA, IN AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN L'UNITA JUNE 24, SURPRISINGLY TOOK A SOMEWHAT MORE HOSTILE LINE TOWARDS NATO THAN BERLINGUER HAS TAKEN IN RECENT MONTHS.) THE PARTY WILL
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PROBABLY CONTINUE TO SEEK TO INCREASE ITS DIALOGUE WITH THE US BOTH DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY FOR THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF ATTEMPTING TO CONVINCE US THAT IT DOES NOT REPRESENT A THREAT TO OUR INTERNATIONAL INTERESTS AND DOES NOT WISH TO BE EITHER ANTI-AMERICAN OR ANTI-SOVIET. VOLPE

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